

# ROAD MEN

## ATTENTION

The time is now here when district road commissioners, road overseers and all citizens subject to road duty are expected to get busy on their roads. This notice is published as a warning that unless these men attend to their duties all the penalties provided in the statutes will be exacted!

The present season has been an unfortunate one both for road work and farm work and, as practically all road officials are farmers, the County Highway Commission has not been inclined, up-to-date, to insist on the neglect of farm duties in favor of road work. However, the Commission believes crops are now in fit condition to justify this warning; that unless the required road work is done between August 1st and September 1st warrants will be sworn out against those derelict in their duty and their names presented to the grand jury.

In view of the fact that there is a new road law applying this year there may be some confusion in the public mind as to the duties of officials and citizens subject to road service. The new law put the direction of road building in the hands of a Highway Commission of three to be elected by the County Court. This commission was granted powers formerly exercised by the court and in some instances increased powers, but subject to the general control of the court. However, many features of the old road laws were incorporated in the new and among the old features retained in the new was provision for the labor of all citizens between certain ages, not physically or mentally disabled, under the direction of road overseers and district commissioners. This provision for universal road work in the public interest is as vital and compelling under the new law as under the old.

It would be regarded as a glad privilege and not an onerous public duty if human nature was attuned to that ideal conception of service which makes all men delight in promoting the public welfare.

This law provides, as an alternative for labor, that citizens may pay off their road time before a certain date and this money must be used for building roads in the district where collected under the direction of the district commissioners.

Many district commissioners and overseers complain that their hands have paid off their time and they have no labor with which to work. In most cases this is not true, but at any rate this fact cannot be avoided; that they either have the labor or the money in the hands of the Trustee and the law directs them to take this money and hire the work done. Beginning August 1st no excuse can be accepted for non-compliance with this plain duty.

The County Highway Commission wishes also to take this opportunity to render a partial report to the public on what has already been done. The progress to date has been as disappointing to the Commission as to the public. However, we believe the condition of our roads and bridges this season to be due, for most part, to agencies beyond all human control. The Commission has centralized authority and responsibility which was one of the objects of the new law

but its members are not omnipotent. They have no jurisdiction over the elements of nature, Eros, Jupiter, Pluvius, etc. who send wind and water, calamity and disaster on an erring world. They are not responsible for the March flood which destroyed bridges, levees and roads indiscriminately. Neither should they be blamed for the subsequent weeks of dampness which retarded road work for nearly two months and partly ruined what had already been done. This is not said in sarcastic humor but for the benefit of those whose complaints imply that the Legislature should have endowed the Commission with some of the powers of Providence.

Now, that being understood, what has been accomplished?

In the beginning the Commission believed that to get roads and bridges built economically it would be necessary to provide power units large enough to pull heavy machinery under full load day after day. The county had formerly tried mule teams and found them expensive and liable to default under heavy and sustained service. The general experience of the country was demonstrating that tractor power was most efficient and economical. However, a previous experience with a tractor in this county had been disappointing, yet the Commission believed it was due to the use of the wrong kind of a tractor and did not controvert the generally accepted opinion that tractor power was efficient any more than a lame or balky mule would argue against mule power in general as an economic asset.

So it was decided to buy three light weight tractors of 25 horse power. The Commission realized that three tractors would not handle all the roads in the county but we were unwilling to commit the county to too large an expenditure on an untried experiment.

Districts 2, 3, 9 and 15 wanted contractors so bids were asked in these districts. No bids were received from Districts 3 and 9. A bid from District 2 was rejected as excessive and in 15 a contract was awarded to Mr. Bishop to do certain work not provided for in a tractor route through that district.

Tractor routes were laid out on main roads covering many districts and comprising about 306 miles of roads. The remainder of the roads were to be worked by the overseer system and if the tractors proved successful, it was planned to equip the county with enough outfits next year to work all the roads that way. This, then, was the program for the year's work.

So far approximately 189 miles of the 306 in the tractor program have been built in spite of the fact that the month of May and half June were a total loss for roadwork. It is safe to assert that the three tractors will more than complete the program laid out for them before the end of the season and in the late fall and winter will keep these roads dragged and in good condition. But aside from this tractor work little else can be done, except in one or two districts the road commissioners and overseers have laid down on the job and it is now up to them to get busy.

So much briefly for the roads. What has been done about bridge building and levee work?

Over 150 bridges, large and small, were wiped out by the March flood and as many more displaced. With the aid of the magistrates in each district something like half of these have been replaced with permanent or makeshift structures and the rest remain to be built. The lack of labor and material has been the great handicap here. This and excessive prices asked by contractors impelled the Commission to establish five bridge crews under salary. These crews, four of which are just beginning operation, consist of a foreman, two negro hands and a team and wagon. The first crew proved a great saving over the contract method, in some cases doing the work for half the contract price.

However, these crews will not be able to do all the levee and bridge replacement work necessary before we enter another winter and in next week's Falcon will be published a list of bridges and levees on which the commission will cooperate with the District Commissioners in receiving bids for this work. On a date to be announced next week in the Falcon the Commission plans to be in daily session between the hours of 2 and 5 P. M. at the Court House to receive bids for this work and let contracts. The Commission would like the attendance and counsel of all magistrates interested in any such work in their districts.

In conclusion we wish to reiterate that all road officials must now get busy or face the consequences. The following paragraphs from the road law are called to their attention:

Sec. 22. Be it further enacted, That district commissioners shall appoint for a term of one year an overseer for each section of public road as established by the Quarterly County Court and that this compensation shall not exceed \$2.00 per day for ten hours each for actual time while engaged in necessary work, said compensation is to be paid out of the district road fund as hereinbefore provided. He shall have charge of all tools belonging to his section of road; shall take care of same and turn them over to his successor when appointed. It shall be a misdemeanor for any overseer, subject to road duty having received notice of his appointment, to fail or refuse to serve or fail or refuse to fully and faithfully perform his duty as road overseer, and to keep his section of road in reasonable repair at all times throughout his term of office; and the Grand Juries of said counties of the State shall have inquisitorial power to investigate the conduct of road overseers under this Act and shall make presentment against such road overseers for any failure to perform his duty under this Act.

Sec. 26. Be it further enacted, That the Grand Juries of the Circuit Courts of the counties embraced in the provisions of this Act shall have and exercise full inquisitorial powers in respect to violations of any and all of the provisions of this Act and the Judges of such Courts shall give this law in special charge to the Grand Juries.

# FAYETTE COUNTY HIGHWAY COMMISSION

WYATT WILKINSON, Chairman.